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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

The Story of Vedic India, as embodied principally in the Rig-Veda.

By ZÉNAÏDE A. RAGOZIN. [The Story of the Nations.] (New York and London : G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1895. Pp. xii, 457.)

THE writer of a book on Indian history encounters, at the very start, difficulties of an unusual character. There are no fixed dates prior to the date of Buddha, about 500 B.C. Instead, a certain measure of fluctuating relative chronology, based upon internal data of the most perplexing character. Thus, it has been possible, quite recently, for two scholars, Professor Jacobi of Bonn, and the Hindu Bál Gangádhár Tilak, to assume simultaneously, upon the basis of certain astronomical data, the remote period 4000–4500 B.C. as the date of the composition of the earliest Hindu document, the Rig-Veda. At the same time a French scholar, J. Halévy, has still more recently repeated an argument, advanced by himself ten years ago, which tends in exactly the opposite direction. According to this the Vedic texts cannot have been reduced to writing earlier than the period of Alexander's invasion of India.¹ Even the most exuberant faith in the capacities for memorizing with which we may credit the ancient Hindus, judging by their performances in that direction to-day, is not sufficient to warrant the belief that oral tradition alone could have carried the large body of Vedic texts through many centuries. Then there is the rather Philistine older assumption that the Vedas were composed from 1200–1500 B.C., a view based upon the vaguest kind of impression as to the quantity of time that must have been consumed in composing the Vedas, the bulk of which certainly preceded the date of Buddha.

This absence of fixed dates reflects very directly upon the judgment of the chronological flavor, so to speak, of the early Hindu documents. To some the Rig-Veda is still the "hoary bible of the Aryans"; to others it is the product of an advanced phase of priest-craft, as remote as possible from any kind of primitiveness. Thus the valuation of the very substance of the Vedic sources is uncertain; there is no point of vantage for a fixed perspective; the estimate of each series of fact shifts with each different vision.

Again, there are no names of historical consequence prior to Buddha. Here and there the name of some priestly sage is recorded with a certain emphasis, but he is famous for some particular trick at the sacrifice, or some refinement of theosophic speculation, rather than the establish-

¹ See *Revue Sémitique*, July, 1895.

ment of a new phase of thought, or broad religious law. Here and there secular chiefs (*rājas*) are mentioned, but they lead no political movement. They are mentioned in laudatory terms when they give much to the priests, or their downfall is depicted when they come into conflict with priestly arrogance. At best they engage in predatory conquests that leave behind them no permanent political history. There is no Moses and there are no Pharaohs, no Zoroaster and no Achaemenian dynasty.

This want of saliency on the side of political and nomistic events characterizes the early historiography of India. It is largely a history of religion and private antiquities, extending over a very considerable period, no point of which is absolutely fixed. The most important and dignified document, the Rig-Veda, is a collection of hymns to nature gods, recited in connection with the sacrifice, a thoroughly priestly production, the end and final outcome of an indefinitely long period of priestly activity. The document next in importance, the Atharva-Veda, is a collection of charms and prayers connected with the daily life of the people and its rulers, — prayers for health and long life, charms against specific diseases, prayers for the prosperity of house, field, and cattle, incantations against demons and enemies, etc. These are flanked by the so-called Brāhmanas, elaborate technical expositions of the sacrifice, which contain, incidentally, many valuable glimpses of Vedic life and institutions. And there are, also, a certain class of treatises, the so-called Sūtras, apparently of later composition, though their subject-matter is not at all late, which, for the first time, deal with the life of the Hindus systematically: they are codexes of religious customs and laws; they prescribe the individual's conduct from birth to death, his relations to his fellow-men, and to the state or community.

The ideal history of the Hindu people of Vedic times needs to extract and elaborate all this literature, to present every detail of character, life, and history, in so far as these texts furnish evidence. Chronological distinctions may be ventured upon here and there, but, above all, the entire mass of recorded facts, arranged point by point, are an obviously necessary preliminary. A sober collection of this sort could afford to lie waiting patiently for its final chronological irradiation. This is pretty certain to come in due time. Of such a collection there are, at present, only fragments.

Madame Ragozin is favorably known as the writer of a number of "stories" of ancient Oriental peoples, the Chaldæans, the Assyrians, and the Medo-Persians. Her work is professedly that of popularization, and that, too, in domains of historical and philological research where nearly everything is in a state of flux. We may state at once that she has brought to her present task reading of no mean breadth, a certain untarnished freshness of vision, and enthusiasm broaching on fervor. The *Story of India* is thoroughly readable, and will serve the purpose of a first acquaintance with the subject. The author does not seem to know that she was preceded, in 1893, by a work dealing with precisely the same

subject in a more substantial form, Edmund Hardy's *Die Vedisch-Brahmanische Periode*. Hermann Oldenberg's notable book, *Die Religion des Veda* (1894), probably came too late to permit her to incorporate its results. There is, too, — and that is curious in the case of an American writer, — no evidence of any acquaintance with a considerable body of significant researches on Vedic mythology and institutions, printed during the last decade by American scholars in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, and the *American Journal of Philology*, though she often goes no little distance afield in the presentation of antiquated views of older European scholars. Thus the myth of the two dogs of Yama, the Hindu Cerberi, the messengers of the Hindu Pluto (pp. 182, 256 ff.), has been elucidated in an article in the fifteenth volume of the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. The Vedic texts themselves state explicitly that they are sun and moon, who pick out men for death in their daily coursings across the sky. Similarly the myth of Saranyū (pp. 252–256) is discussed from a new point of view in the same volume of the same journal.

The real difficulty with a work like the present is that it is a compilation, and is not done by a professional Vedist. There is still so much to be done in the first editing, critical restoration, and philological interpretation of Vedic texts that Vedic scholars are hardly willing to engage in the work of superstructure upon a shifting foundation. And yet the professional scholar alone is capable of measuring and presenting the measurements of the difficulties and uncertainties which attach to any line of facts. Thus the book errs distinctly and fundamentally in presenting Vedic history almost entirely upon the basis of the priestly, sacrificial collection, the Rig-Veda, and practically ignoring the plainer and more vital records of the Atharva-Veda, and the Grihya-sūtras, the repositories of Vedic popular life. As well present our civilization upon the incidental statements of the Book of Common Prayer. This error, to be sure, is one which has prevailed until comparatively recent times; the contrary tendency is a development of the past dozen years, but none the less important, of course. Three chapters (V.–VII.) are given over to mythology, one (IX.) to early culture. This, moreover, is based upon the incidental, scant data of the Rig-Veda, and yet it is the business of the Atharvan and the Sūtras to deal with that very subject. The book gains something in antique flavor and romantic coloring, but loses greatly in firmness of outline and surety of touch.

The reader may be warned against propagating the Sanskrit, and the linguistic statements of the author. The former is frequently misspelled, the latter are full of antiquated futilities. The style of the book is fresh and agreeable, marred here and there (e.g. pp. 52, 64) by sentences of portentous periodicity.

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